CORE GUIDE / 01

M&E Foundations

Understand the M&E cycle and build a useful starting point for programme evidence.

START WITH A DECISION, NOT A FORM. Ask what decision the evidence should inform before deciding what to measure.

The essential idea

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is a practical way to ask: **what is changing, why might it be changing, and what should we do next?** It is not only reporting. It is a decision-support system.

WHY IT MATTERS	Monitoring tracks routine progress. Evaluation examines merit, value or contribution. Learning turns evidence into improvement.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning are different - and connected

Monitoring tracks routine progress. Evaluation examines merit, value or contribution. Learning turns evidence into improvement.

- Monitoring asks whether delivery and early progress are on track.
- Evaluation asks what changed, for whom, in what conditions and with what confidence.
- Learning asks what the team will adapt, strengthen, pause or test next.

The M&E cycle

A useful system follows a cycle rather than a one-time data collection exercise.

- Clarify the decision that matters.
- Set a small number of meaningful measures.
- Collect and check evidence.
- Analyse patterns and limitations.
- Discuss findings, decide and follow up.

Worked field example

A school-support programme is delivering coaching to teachers. The team does not need more activity counts; it needs to know whether coaching is leading to observable classroom practice change.

Programme question	Evidence to use	Decision it can support
Are supported teachers using the targeted classroom practices more consistently?	Observation rubric scores, coaching attendance, teacher reflections and sampled lesson plans.	Continue, redesign or target coaching based on the practices that remain weak.

Try it in your work

- Write one decision your programme must make in the next 90 days.
- List only the 3-5 pieces of evidence that would make that decision more informed.
- Name who will review the evidence and by when.

Common mistakes

- Starting with an attractive dashboard before defining a question.
- Treating data collection as the endpoint.
- Collecting every possible metric because it is available.

A stronger habit

- Use a decision log after every review.
- Keep the first M&E plan lean and testable.
- Add complexity only when it improves a real decision.

REFLECT

What could your team stop collecting because it does not currently support a decision, accountability requirement or learning conversation?